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SUBJECT: SRSG PLEDGES TO PUSH SUDANESE TOWARD ELECTIONS

REF: (A) KHARTOUM 2011

(B) KHARTOUM 1971
(C) KHARTOUM 1834

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On 23 December 2007, members of the Electoral Donor Group (EDG) met with UN SRSG Ashraf Qazi to share concerns regarding Sudan's preparation for the 2009 elections. The EDG is worried that because the GNU has not passed the electoral law nor established a National Electoral Commission (NEC), the CPA-mandated timeline for the elections will either not be met or will be rushed.

The SRSG recognized the group's concerns and said that UNMIS, the organization with the official mandate to assist the government in carrying out the 2009 elections, will meet regularly with government and political party leaders to encourage effective electoral preparation. SRSG Qazi also reassured the group that UNMIS will work closely with the donors on election preparation and execution, as well as keep it updated on Sudanese electoral developments. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) SRSG Qazi recognized the lengthy delays in preparation of the electoral law and appointment of an NEC. He stated his commitment to push the NCP and SPLM leadership to pass the requisite legislation that will allow electoral preparation to begin. Qazi noted that elections that do not meet the July 2009 deadline will "severely affect" the implementation of the CPA. Qazi will offer UN electoral expertise and donor support through the EDG, though he cautioned that he must do this gently, so as not to sour Khartoum on working with the international community on elections. Ray Kennedy, UNMIS Chief Electoral Affairs Officer, underscored that, based on his experience with other elections, it is important to help Sudan "own their process." Kennedy further stated that UNMIS hoped to have a core team in place by March 2008, and that the team would likely include more than 200 staff.

¶3. (U) Qazi expressed uncertainty that Khartoum will be willing to formalize an UNMIS role on elections and acknowledged Khartoum's early reluctance to allow international support for the elections. Qazi contrasted Khartoum's attitude toward international support with that of the government of Iraq, where he served as SRSG from 2004-2007. He said the UN will likely not have the same "active role" in helping Sudan prepare for and execute its elections as it did in the 2005 Iraqi elections. Nonetheless, Qazi said UNMIS would create a high-level electoral steering committee, composed of donors and NEC members that would meet regularly to discuss election preparation timelines and activities.

¶4. (U) NOTE: This month, the GNU announced that it will extend its parliamentary session through mid-January 2008 in order to review and ratify the electoral law. The next parliamentary session begins in April. END NOTE.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: SRSG Qazi appears eager to engage with the NCP and

SPLM on election issues. With a mandate to assist with elections, UNMIS will play a central role in keeping the GNU partners on track.

However, as Qazi articulated, the Sudanese may not be receptive to donor assistance. Though the SPLM has been receptive to assistance in the south, UNMIS and other donors such as the Dutch share our perception that Khartoum has thus far been reluctant to allow international engagement. In order for donors to provide elections assistance, the GNU must formally invite such assistance. SRSG Qazi is hoping to persuade Khartoum to do so but may face an uphill battle. The next key milestone will be passage of the elections law, hopefully in January. Following that, the GNU will face immediate inquiries from donors on how they may assist the electoral commission.

POWERS